

Smoking Declines Among BC Youth, Study Shows

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Vancouver, BC

More BC youth are deciding not to smoke, according to a new study showing an 18% percentage point decline in cigarette smoking in the past five years. Seventy-three percent of students in grades 7-12 were non-smokers last year, compared to 55% in 1998. The decline in tobacco use was one of the most dramatic findings in the report, "Healthy Youth Development: Highlights of the 2003 Adolescent Health Survey." The McCreary Centre Society, a non-profit BC health research organization, released the report today.

The survey results show that "in many respects, young people in the province are in better health and taking fewer risks" than the youth of five or ten years ago.

Improvements in youth health status include:

- Alcohol and drug use have declined
- Fewer youth drink and drive
- More young people are waiting longer to have sex
- Injury rates have declined among young people
- Fewer youth report physical or sexual abuse

Issues that continue to leave room for improvement include:

- More youth are overweight and obese
- Less than half of students always feel safe at school
- Nearly one in four girls report having been in contact with a stranger on the Internet who made her feel unsafe
- More than half of youth gambled in the past year
- The number of youth who consider or attempt suicide has not declined

The report draws on findings of two previous provincial surveys conducted by McCreary in 1992 and 1998, showing a decade of trends in youth health. The latest survey confirms that young people who have strong connections to family, school and community, and who have someone to talk to when problems arise, have better physical and emotional health than youth without such connections. In particular, adolescents whose parents were home at critical times during the day, such as meals and bedtime, had higher educational aspirations and were less likely to engage in risky behaviours.

The report is based on a comprehensive survey of 30,500 BC students. The survey includes 140 questions on health status, including health promoting practices and

behaviours that are harmful to health. Surveys were administered in classrooms in collaboration with the public health nurses of BC The BC Ministry of Children and Family Development and the Ministry of Health Services provided funding for the project. A wide range of government, education and community organizations use information from the survey to plan services and programs for youth.

The report is available through The McCreary Centre Society at 604-291-1996 or on the Internet at www.mcs.bc.ca

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